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Series of First Volumes, Number Three

Orioles & Blackbirds

ORIOLES & BLACKBIRDS

HI SIMONS



CHICAGO - WILL RANSOM - MCMXXII

monograph

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Epistle Dedicatory

Dear Bernadine—

None you disliked is among these.

Hi

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Three Crimson Tulips

Shermerville Road

Leaves live by night
more delicately than they
can live when light
of day
effaces subtleties.

Elm-leaves on an immobile tree—
beside a road that no unhatted fool but me
would plod, alone,
past moonset—
flitter and swarm,
like bees,
and drone.

Yet—
rather the warm,
unworded flow of air you breathe
I'd hear beside me,
than murmuring hives of leaves
upon a tree.

Three Lines

Moon, is it just because so woman-pale and
 woman-slim you hover
Over the orchard while the robust sun sways
 lakeward into cover,
That merely glance of you impels to thoughts
 of Bernadine, my lover?

Remembering One Night

I would divest you of soft things,
Unswathe you of the grey and faint-pink
 swathings

In which you're wound,
Wherewith you're bound.

I would twine curled brown leaves into your hair
And girdle you with moss.

I would sing to your naked dancing on a
 moon-blue hill of sand.

Cubes & Colored Curves

Portrait of an Old Roue

The seeds of his sin
Thrust tiny red roots
Among the cell-crevices of his face.
Now their minute purple tendrils
Trace, on his cheeks and nose,
Vine-patterns as intricately beautiful
As his fastidious iniquities.

Open Window

That the night may pass with beauty,
Leave the white bed forsaken;
Come in your slender nudity
And watch with me the slow stars carve
Their fret of silver arcs on indigo:
Oh! tranquilize your passion,
That the night may pass with beauty.

Decoration: Ships Going Out

Slow shuttles weave—
weave into the night—
weave on warp of sky-blue, cloud-white—
weave heavy yarn of purple ship-smoke:
strands of sky-blue,
cloud-white wisps
skeins of mulberry ship-smoke weave
heliotrope horizon.

Sea-fingers spin—
spin blue water into green—
gold-brown out of green:
slow-spinning sea-fingers
draw threads from sky,
threads from shore-shadows—
spin grape-color and silver
out of sky and shore-shadows.

Slender sea-fingers spin green and burn orange,
silver and purple together.
Slow shuttles weave mulberry ship-smoke
into a heliotrope horizon—
weave into night.

Autumn, Lake Bemidji

No more, in the cedar-swamp,
The red chevrons on the blackbird's wing
Are wind-swayed up and down
In unison with the highbush-cranberry clusters,
Scarlet with frost-bite.
With many an affrighted signal-call
The mottle-bosomed yellow-hammer
Has fled the dusty jackpine copse.
Now a slate-colored heron
Flaps out of the sallow sedges
And steers southward
Over the grey waves and the broken brown reeds,
Trailing its legs like the rudder of a canoe.

October Sunset

Clouds like swans
with orchid-colored plumes
glide upon jade water:
magenta-bellied gulls—
gold wings, flamingo-tipped—
hover in cold purple heights.

Green

Field-green,
Indigo blended with a little canary yellow;
Blue-green
Like the lush leaves of the marigold;
Broad level meadow of sprouting wheat
Intense green
With a shimmering sheen,
Like a velvet portierre
In a walnut-raftered room.

Tree-green,
Cobalt-blue wedded to maize yellow
Then sprinkled with honey-powder;
Sunny-green
Like morning light on a great water;
Sex-green,
Yellow pollen bursting from the soft womb of
 the pod—
Breast-buds of a passionate virgin
Eager for the press of a mature athletic man.

Bud-green,
Drops of light blue blurred into a matt of
 water-color yellow;
April green
Of first buds flowering on the boughs of poplar
 trees;
Faint yellow-green,
The single fringe of trees along the curving
 shore
Making delicate trceries
Against the mists of the river
Like an embroidered sylvan scene
In old, old lace.

Sleep

Thoughts flare and flicker in my mind
Like a host of little candles in a great dark
chamber . . .

Now some unseen one enters
And snuffs out the flames,
One by one . . .

Waters

Out of the yellow-tamarack morass
The olive-colored water of the river
Flows into the round basin of the lake . . .
Tawny muscles of a sunburnt arm
Pressing against the resilience
Of a white breast.

Berries

Midsummer in the North-country
Parched bushes in the stumpy fields where
 cool forests were
And, under the shady leaves of a low shrub,
Blueberries,
Like clusters of little blue moons
Under the foliage of night.

Scintillations

The moon drips a purple oil
Upon the undulating surface of the lake.
Out from the tremulous, olive-drab shadow of
 the pier,
Darts a green-backed water beetle;
It cuts a zig-zag lightning track across the
 lambent phosphorescence,
Then vanishes into the rolling black waste . . .
So desire comes into her eyes, and is gone.

Moonset

All the long evening
The hot yellow moon
Kept slipping toward the house-tops—
Slipping, slipping, slipping—
Until, when a faraway churchbell
Struck just once,
It fell into a tall black chimney.
Then a wind came out of the west
And blew all the heat away.

My Mind

An indigent old woman
Fingers trinkets and remnants
Over a bargain-counter
And then moves on
Without purchasing.

Of Helen

Come, amorous thoughts!
Now that the straight, sharp-angled
 imperatives of work are laid aside,
Fill my mind with visions of her,
Like little golden goddesses
Gleaming all adown a long black corridor!
Occupy every niche of my soul
With her fine-metalled image,
That I may adulate, unreservedly.

Eternally

Timorously wavering,
An ephemeral splendour like a butterfly's
 wing in sunlight,
The little yellow flame creeps down the taper
Into the deep cup of the candlestick . . .
It is blue like a breath of noon-cloud . . .
It is a red cinder in the black of a forest camp.

Die, small light! Vanish utterly:
I shall remain in this night-dungeoned corner,
Loving her.

Going to Sleep

Lovely thoughts came, silent, through the night
And led me on from scene to happy scene
Until at last they drew their glowing tapering arms
From the numbing clasp of my mind,
And abandoned me
To the passionless placidity of Sleep,
Dull spouse, and swollen-eyed, of Weariness.

Tree

There is a lemon-colored elmtree near the road.
Autumn has yellowed its periphery of leaves
But the inner foliage remains untouched by frost,
Pea-green.

The Versifier

I take words—
Thin, delicately moulded strips of speech—
And join them end to end
Cunningly, so that the pattern is unbroken,
And so make a frame
For an exquisite thought.

Holiday Air

He stands on the cold curb, whistling.
Pizzicato puffs of blue breath
Issue on the slow winter wind—
Dots and dashes of melody
On an invisible piano-roll.

Lovers in the Dark

A spark blown from a cigarette
Fades into ash
Like a flake of snow
That melts before alighting . . .
They kiss.

Male Remark to the Spring Wind

Silk legs —
because of their accustomedness,
thirty above zero or below —
do not disturb.
But, oh!
why orange bloomers,
why the obscene press
of skirts on thighs,
why garters —
intriguing rags:
are they merely to torment
the effort to be continent?

The Black Uniform

Chant of the Shoveler

I am the shoveler.

I'm the young fellow who stands all day
On the feeding-platform in the brick plant
Pushing great shovelsful of clay
Into the champing maw of the crushing-machine,
With rhythmic vigorous slide and pull of muscles
Shoving chunks of hard dirt into the machine.

*I was the sleek young gentleman of the cities,
Inhabitant of drives and boulevards,
Frequenter of tearooms where rich women went
to smoke their Russian cigarets uncensored,
Of suave hotels, of cafés where the laughs and
the dancers played:*

*I was the well-dressed young professional man,
Flipping a slim slick walking-cane,
Twisting waxed ends of a little brown mustache,
Hatted and gloved and gaitered to the letter of
style and taste.*

See me now—
As the shoveler!
Stooping to the rough task, clad in boots and
 overalls,
Dirty overalls, bagging over the gumboot
 tops, sagging loosely over my hips,
Arms bare to the shoulders, overshirt cast aside,
Bare-headed, bound with a blue handkerchief
 like a fillet
To hold my straggling hair and stay the
 trickling sweat.

See me now—
Working callouses on my palms and the edges
 of my fingers,
Joyous in the strain and pull of muscles,
In the swing and toss of the shovel.

*I was the prison greenhorn;
I was the man who quailed as they marched
 me to work,
And cringed as a weakling
In the first days of my toil.*

Watch me now—

I am the shoveler!

I am the fellow who does more work than any
of my comrades,

Scorning the barrow-pushers who lag in their
weakness.

I am the fellow who feeds the roaring machine

With back bended for hours at a stretch,

Scooping up the clay, bare-handed—

With legs broadly braced and flexing,

Shovel shooting out straight from the shoulders—

Then flinging it into the hopper with a
vigorous controlled jerk.

I am the deep-breathing laborer,

Digesting big meals of coarse food,

Tanning, strengthening, growing, toughening
every body-fibre.

I am the man who shouts in exultation of the toil.

I am the fellow who loudly sings above the
din and the dust

To the accompaniment of the clanging
thousand-pound crushing-wheels!

I am the shoveler!

I am the lover of work!

Singers

Soldiers sing and prisoners sing
And I think the sweetest songs I've ever heard
are those sung in camps and prisons
and the places of the oppressed
And I say the common music of their songs is
more stirring, more inspiring, than any
I've heard in churches.

Quarantine on the barracks . . .
One red coal of sunset burning in an ash-grey
sky that envelopes wooded hills—heaps
of black cinders:
Dark outside; dusk within—
Only the scarlet glow from a huge open stove,
And on the bunks lying, close together, arms
around each other,
Soldiers, boyish soldiers, looking into the
ruddy blast of the fire, and singing—
Singing *When It's Apple Blossom Time in
Normandy*, *Annie Laurie*, and *The
Trail of the Lonesome Pine*.

And at last, late in the night, one lad
Singing for the others, *I Love You Truly,*
Truly, Dear—

Tears sparkling on the faces in the
emberglow . . .
Lonely soldiers, singing, in the night.

Three-day blizzard careening down the
Missouri Valley—

Lashing snow and malicious cold into the
prison quarries:

Even the guards retreat . . .

Into the tin-roofed shack of rough plank they
go, prisoners and sentries together.

And there, crowding on the dirty benches
around the little stove, they sit all day,
singing—

Singing *There's a Long, Long Trail*

A-Winding, Over There, and other

songs of their comrades in the trenches.

Prisoners singing in the shack all the howling
day . . .

Outside you could have heard their manly
 voices rising in full chords when the
 blizzard lulled . . .

Winter night in the prison . . .
Down to the locked-cell basement
Shuffles Eleven-seven-forty-eight:
A colored boy—an eight-year man—
Shuffles down after his twelve hours on the gang,
Is locked in his cell, and lies there singing—
Singing darky blues—

O, take me back, sweet wo-o-man;

O, try me one mo' time.

Ah know Ah done yo' dirty,

But 'twa'n't no hangin' crime.

Singing blues in a mournful soprano moan
Quavering down the half-lit basement corridor.

There's a "wobbly" in the hole:
He "bucked" today—refused to work:
Fourteen days in solitaire . . .

Two stories above the basement where he lies
His comrades gather in an open cell and stand
singing—

Singing wobbly songs, songs of the reds, *The
Marseillaise, The Internationale—*

Singing into the ventilator that carries the
song to the hole:

*Then raise the scarlet standard high!
Beneath its folds we'll live and die.
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,
We'll keep the Red Flag flying here!—*

Prisoners singing hymns of liberty
That resound through air-shafts into every
wing of the prison.

Songs of freedom

Songs of love

Songs of prisoners and soldiers . . .

And I say that young men who are pent up
and oppressed with yearning

Are the best of all singers.

Nightfall in Prison

When the velvet folds of the twilight-curtain
descend
On the gold-and-pink embellishments of day,
And in town the westward-looking cottages—
Yellow, green and blue and white—
Stand in the dimming rays of sunset;
When in the wild the purple pools of shadow
Over-rise their rugged shores
And flow and flood with dewy dusk
The field, the grove, the hill—
Think then
Of a single tinted feather from the pinion of
day's flight
Fluttering over a distant hill,
Clutched at, in its fall, from a grated window;
And of cells within
Where shadows of bars lie like dead days in
the tombs of time
Till darkness falls, in silent heavy-heaping clods,
Burying all.

A Tree by the Road

The hawthorne tree
On the roadside near the prison
Is like a pensive lady of gentle birth;
And in the evening
When we march in from work
Its dark leaves, lighter green at the ends—
Like the tips of slender, soft fingers—
Reach down
As if offering caresses,
Languidly,
Knowing they cannot touch her lover.

A Rose

Pink petals of rose:
Bloom.
You will share this prison-cell with me,
You in your tincup of water in the corner,
I in my narrow cot.
You were sent hither unwillingly—
And so was I—
—for dear love's sake
—and I, for liberty's.

Perfumed petals of rose:
Bloom.
Suffuse your fragrance through the corridor.
Your sweetness
Will be a sign of beauty in this bitter place—
And so will I,
And so will I.

Pale petals of rose:
Fade;
But you shall never die:
In my heart
I will bear the loveliness of you always.
Perhaps some
Will cherish the fragrance that is in the depth
of me.

In beauty
You will be immortal,
And so will I,
O! so may I!

Ah, petals of rose:
You are gone!
Gone from the prison-cell,
Passed from the earth, as I shall pass.
Your time was brief:
How brief is mine!

The Star

When the "screws" had made their last round
And the lights in the cells were out,
I arose and peered out of the window.
And just over the edge of the prison-wall
I saw a tiny, twinkling, yellow star,
Furtively winking at me—
Like the eye of the Infinite—
Mischievously happy
Because it had slipped me a bit of joy
Over the wall, from "the outside."

Dust in the Road

The dust
Is a yellow-grey veil
Over the limbs of the wind.
And the little breeze dons it
That her fleet liveness
And the whirling torsions of her sprite's form
May be apparent
As she gaily runs down the road
To greet us.

Taps

Out of the night
Up from the serene valley of the Missouri
Over the free forested Kansas hills
Come notes of a bugle—
Mincing, silver-slippered steps of music.

There are Moments of Release

There are moments of release from this
imprisonment:
Sometimes, while marching to the quarries
where we work,
I have a feeling of freedom from the sentries
and the gang,
As if alone plunging into the orange vortex of
the winter dawn.

There are moments of tranquillity in slavery:
Sometimes, while working on the rock-ledge,
I become serene and sure under the glow of
sunset,
Imagining me couched
On the green valley-floor outside the walls
Where shadows from the crest of the quarry
dance
Like blue fountains.

There Will Be Days of Love Released

O, there will be days of love released
And red kisses passed in the light of the morning
And walks on the yellow dunes, white limbs
gleaming in the sunlight . . .

Who will greet me at The Dawn—
Who will there be to take my hand when the
gates swing out—
Who will be my companion in the brave
journey down the free paths of the world?

For us there will be the tough joy of the
great strife
And the conscience that millions make the
forward stride in unison with us
And meaningful handclasps with many
comrades in thronged thoroughfares.

Closest of comrades, who will you be—and do
you yearn for me as I do for you—
And will you be young and beautiful—and
will you be gay and strong—
And will you be eager for the toil of struggle—
the interludes of love by dunes and on
wooded hills?

Then I call to you, I bid you have courage,
And I bid you prepare for the journey of love
and contest
And I urge you, make ready, as I now
prepare, for the signal of endless
adventures.

For there will be no end—
There will be no tranquil ceasing of the strife—
There will be no seclusion ever from the many,
the many of our generation who press
about us, press forward with us.

But there will be days of love released
And comings close to each other in the
glorious thick of things
Aye, and intense satisfactions in the nights
that are noisy and dark with struggle.

Near Freedom

Night fades:
Cloud-murk dissolves,
The dim stars reappear,
Now the sky is pallid grey —
And now a tint of red flows in
Like blood returning to the lips of one a-swoon.
The miracle of morn impends—
Day, that was dead, re-lives.

I have walked the night through sturdily,
Nor have I flinched at stumbling,
Nor have I faltered, nor cried out,
Nor turned aside from hideous shapes.
All but done is the journey through the dark
And I who set gaily forth at dusk press on,
With neither bitterness nor daunt,
Eager to greet The Dawn.

En Route

The Pebble and the Wave

A Dance Theme

The little agate pebble
Has been on the yellow sands
For long—oh, ever so long.
And the blue white-feathered wave
On the roof of the great green sea
Has been yearning for it—and yearning.
Often—oh, often—the turquoise wavelet
Has leaped upon the amber sands toward the
 agate pebble,
Flinging out its sun-flashing ribbons,
Like rainbow-scaled nets,
Striving to lap it up,
To lave it all about with fluid caress.
And sometime, when the tide surges,
The turquoise wave on the emerald sea
Will enfold, overwhelm, embrace the small
 stone
And bear it off to its lair in the sea-depths,
Swirling and swirling,
Interwrapped, over-rolling,
Down to the oozy green caverns,
Forever.

*When the Moon Pales
and the Daylight Whitens the Shadow-caves
Wherein Love Lies*

Nereid of the river's ripples,
While I sought amid the sedges
For a reed-lute for my song,
Why did you 'rise from the lilies?
Every wand that waved and whispered,
Straight I seized upon to pluck it,
Seemed invested of your graces,
Seemed your swaying, slender person.
When I moved away, rejecting,
Formed anew, you followed after:
As a dragon-fly you darted,
Settled on my bosom's whiteness;
Sweetly murmured with your wings,
Like a perfumed lady fanning—
Then you stung me into passion! . . .
Lilith-like, you faded from me;
Faded, too, my melody;
Faded all except the wavelets'
Languorous monotony.

Mother and Daughter

White—

Or perhaps blue; not too lake-deep nor yet
too thin like summer-noon horizons—

Mauve in which the blue-white smoke of
autumn twilight streams in errant
waftures.

Pale pink

Shell-like, transparent,

As a fragrant fragile old rose-jar that my
mother received from her mother and
the mothers before her.

These two, blending,

Mantle around me like a rare scarf of spider-
gauze aged in the purple recesses of
some Japanese temple

And dyed by water-color magenta.

Legend

She whom the genii guard and groom to
 become the priestess of their
 enchantments
Is the sacred child of the sultan.
Wherefore she sits alone
In the great chamber in the minaret tower of
 the palace.
And the walls are yellow like the sun-
 showered sands of the desert
And the ceiling is blue like the sky.
There is a heap of rugs upon which—
Embanked with silken cushions of the color of
 many peacock plumes—
Is the wise maiden,
The diminutive temple of her divine spirit
 hung with veils,
Blue-green like skeins of moonlight.

She sits in solitary quietude
And her brown eyes are half shut
As she listens to inaudible whispers from
 invisible presences.
But once—it was when the honey-sap of the
 myrtle suffused sweet incense through
 the night—
She opened her eyes and smiled upon me,
And then she arose
And led me down from the tower, out through
 the court,
Into the Garden of the Soul's Delight.

The Moustache

Here I have been standing on the street-curb
for a half-hour,
Listening to your monotonous small-talk.
And you have been a little flattered by my
seeming interest—
Unsuspecting that not one of your words has
reached my mind
But that I have been thrilled
By watching the sunlight
Glint through your baby-blue eyes,
And your fox-red moustache.

To a Timid Maiden

Very beautiful creature
With eyes as modest as the wild faun's are
reputed to be—
You will learn, when you are older,
That possession of virginity
Is like having in an electrically lighted house
One of those old-fashioned, kerosene parlor-lamps
With a voluminous pink-glass globe:
After you have guarded it for years
Against romping children and other household
perils,
Suddenly, some day, you will ask:
“Well, what good is the old thing, anyway?
Why have I kept it so long?”

The Fable of the Hog

That Desired to be Slaughtered

I wandered into the shade of an effluvious
pigstye
In the rear of an odoriferous packing plant
And leaned there,
Watching a conscientious Italian husband and
a young negro
Drive a large herd of hogs into the
slaughtering-house.
Then, after a time, I strolled on to the far end
of the pigstye
And saw there a hog that had got left behind
the others.
The hog was grunting and squealing most
distressfully
And was trying frantically to get through the
gate
And scamper along with the others,
To be slaughtered.
Upon witnessing which, I turned away
To consider man
And the well-known "social instinct."

Conscription

She took his soul when it was young
To be her own.
She held him close
For she was old and passion-wise.
But when he grew he found another love;
And she was young and dazzling-fair,
And love for her was an intrepid thing:
Not fully realized lust,
But passion tempered with a tenderness
and faith.
But she who was old and passion-wise
held him close;
With many a brutal lure and constant
cruel compulsion,
She made him victim to the madness
of her lust;
With bleeding fingers, tearing teeth,
She clutched him jealously—
Until, at last, worn of her own insanity,
She sank to death;
Then he, with discolored flesh and
running wounds,
Went to his pure, bright love
Who, though she loved him, suffered.

The Fireman: Charcoal Sketch

Look at the fireman cleaning the grates,
With rapid pulls and pushes of the long iron
rod breaking up the clinkers in the
boiler-furnace:

The great line of his body formed thus—
Starting at the left foot, planted forward,
Sweeping upward through the leg,
Crescent-curving along the shadowed furrow
of his spine,

Extended forward in his left arm, pushing
the tool;

This last line echoed in the right elbow, the
impending thrust shown in the upward
and half-forward poise of the arm;

The forward trend of the figure accentuated
by the half-hidden head, in which the
line of the back terminates and is
joined to the line of the arms;

The whole reinforced, made stable, by the
 staunch brace of the right leg, its line
 moving rhythmically into that of the
 spine;
And all these lines shown where light meets
 shadow on the curved surface of the
 body and the wrinkles of the grimy
 clothes,
And all in grays and blacks—
The smutty laborer, his face glowing, glistening
 with sweat before the open fire-box,
The sooty boilers bulking high above,
The coal heap with its myriad glittering facets
 behind,
And all within the shadowy shed-like
 boiler-room.

En Route

From Manhattan half-way across America
 speeding,
Away from the lofty spectacle-city of the
 earth,
Out of the rich historic Empire State,
Across Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, southern
 Illinois,
Over the vast wrinkled map swerving and
 roaring in haste,
By day the autumn-colored Palisades, the
 lakes Erie, Huron, Michigan swiftly
 glimpsing,
At night from my berth the blinking-eyed
 cities rushing through
And passing enigmatic lights in the wilderness
 of dark,
Chicago approaching—the sprawling
 lake-blown working-town—
To your arms, my lover, where you lie in
 sickness!

And what is the long trip worth
Except you receive me with passionate kisses
and tears on your cheek as I lay my
face to yours?

And what is the return worth after the long
departure

Except, coming together again, we have
learned to be closer than ever?

The Fourth Book

from



Number 280 of two hundred and eighty copies on Kelmscott hand-made paper, printed from type on a hand press at *14 West Washington Street, Chicago*. Composition, lettering, and presswork by *Will Ransom*, assisted by *Edmond A. Hunt*, who also designed and cut the linoleum blocks for the jacket decoration. Binding by *Anthony Faifer*. Printing finished
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